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ABSTRACT

The California State Department of Education provides part-day comprehensive development programs for 3- to 5-year-olds from low income families. The programs include educational development, health services, social services, nutrition services, parent education and participation, evaluation, and staff development. The state requires that all subsidized programs evaluate themselves using an instrument called the Program Quality Review. Recognizing that schools are already involved in providing day care programs, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Bush Program has been primarily concerned about issues of child care as opposed to issues of schooling. The Child Care Task Force has several suggestions as to the role schools should play in providing services to four-year-olds and their families: (1) school involvement should be in full day programs as opposed to part day programs, (2) programs should be year round instead of being offered on the traditional school year schedule, (3) children should be presented with educational models that are developmentally appropriate, and (4) programs should offer cultural diversity. A study of 100 randomly selected child care programs in the county of Los Angeles, however, revealed that teachers and directors are running structured programs. This suggests that while the appropriate role for schools should be to extol the positive effects of high quality preschool programs, there is also a need to get the developmental principles that underlie the different curriculum models across to the public. (HOD)

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Yale Conference on Schooling for Four Year Olds

Presentation by Michael Olenick

UCLA Bush Program in Child and Family Policy

May 21, 1986

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The UCLA Bush Program has always been more involved in state issues than in national issues and so I'd like to briefly describe California's involvement in the schooling for four year olds issue. In the State of California, the State Department of Education is already providing part day comprehensive developmental programs for three to five year olds from low income families. The State Preschool programs include educational development, health services, social services, nutrition services, parent education and participation, evaluation, amd staff development. These preschool programs are provided through community agencies as well as by school districts and county offices of education. In Fiscal Year 1984-1985, $33 milion were spent serving over 19,000 children.

The State of California also provides funding for full day child care services in a variety of service delivery modes. The single greatest subsidy program is the developmental child care services run by the school districts and county offices of education. Currently, almost $131 million is spent on slightly more than 28,000 children.

Michael Olenick

In both program types, the major goal is to prepare children and their families to be ready for the rigors of the elementary school. However, as far as far as we know, no systematic data collection has been undertaken to determine whether children enrolled in these programs do better educationally or otherwise than similar children who do not receive these services.

The State tries in many different was to ensure that subsidized programs follow established early childhood and curriculum models and principles. Teachers must have at least 24 units in child development and child related subjects. Administrators must have a supervisors permit which requires additional training in child related areas. Teachers and Administrators can also be trained in Elementary Education, so it is possible to encounter school districts programs where no one is trained in Early Childhood Education.

However, the state also requires that all subsidized programs evaluate themselves using an instrument called the Program Qualty Review. This instrument can be used as a diagnostic tool to identify program aspects which are devleopmental as well as educational. This instrument

identifies standards for administration, children's programs, parent involvement, and community involvement. All subsidized programs must comply with a certain level for all identified items.

Since the schools are already involved in providing both full day and part day programs to needy children and those at risk, the UCLA Bush program has been more concerned in issues of child care as opposed to issues of schooling. Our Child Care Task Force has several suggestions as to the role schools should play in providing services to four year olds and their families.

1) With the demand for child care so high and the availability of affordable quality child care so low, any involvement by the schools shopuld be in full day programs as opposed to part day programs. It is the working poor who are the most in need of these services and in California the least likely to receive them.

2) Programs should be year round instead of being offered on the traditional school year schedule. Since we feel that quality services be provided to both children and working

parents, these services need to be available geared to the schedules of working parents.

3) Programmatically, children should be presented with educational models which are developmentally appropriate. To do this, adults who work with children should be trained in child development, early childhood education and should receive ongoing training in developmental curriculum models. The people who supervise these programs should also be trained in child development and early childhood education.

4) We also suggest that there be cultural diversity in programs. While we have evidence in California that the subsidized programs overall function at a higher level than do similar non-subsidized programs, we do not know whether programs serving particular ethnic and cultural groups address the specific needs of these groups. Programs for Black children, Hispanic children, and other cultural groups should be designed so that cultural diversity is preserved.

There is one issue I would like to raise before this group. What is our reponsibility to the public while we try to integrate child development research with social policy. While we discuss the appropriate role for schooling for four

year olds, in California, many parents and the public have already made the leap to schooling preschool-aged children. To illustrate my point, I'd like to share a little bit of my dissertation work with you.

In my dissertation, I evaluated 100 randomly selected child care programs in the County of Los Angeles. A full 25% of these programs fell into a category we came to call "Sit down, shut up, and count to 100". In these programs children as young as 2 years old were spending entire mornings seated at tables or desks reciting the alphabet, counting to 100, and drawing letters with pencils.

In one program I observed, the teacher told me she believed children of any age could learn to read. She proceeded to teach 18 two year olds the letter 'F'. She stood at a flip chart which had the letter 'F' written on it. She then repeated "a line down, a line across the top, a line down the middle". This instruction continued for 45 minutes. The children were then lined up, marched to the bathroom, and marched back to their seats. For the next 45 minutes, the children were brought up to the blackboard one at a time, to identify their colors. While one child identified colors, the other children fidgeted in their

seats. When it became obvious to the teacher that the children were not paying attention, she smacked the backs of a few chairs with a pointer to get the children's attention.

Over and over again, teachers and directors told me that they ran a structured program. Structure appears to be one of those words which has taken on a popular meaning different than how I would define structure. Teachers and directors also told me they were getting children ready for school and that their children did much better fitting in at the elementary school level. Obviously, the public has bought in to the notion that preschool education makes a difference in school achievement.

However, if many programs are translating structure and early school activities into these sit down shut up models, I think we need to answer these questions:

What does structure mean? What do we mean by early schooling? What are the preacademic skills preschool-aged children should be acquiring and how should these skills be taught?

Finally, the biggest question seems to me to be: How do we educate the public to differentiate between

developmentally appropriate program models and programs which are overly regimented? While we discuss what the appropriate role for schools should be and extoll the positive effects of high quality preschool programs, we also need to get the developmental principles which underlie the different curriculum models across to the public.